

The Cleveland Museum of Art

The Cleveland Museum of Art Presents the Exhibition Alberto Giacometti: Toward the Ultimate Figure

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Touring exhibition featuring the work of Alberto Giacometti, one of the most important artists of the 20th century, makes its national debut in Cleveland

Cleveland (March 10, 2022) — Co-organized by the Fondation Giacometti in Paris and the Cleveland Museum of Art, ***Alberto Giacometti: Toward the Ultimate Figure*** [1] illuminates Alberto Giacometti's (1901–1966) major achievements of the postwar years (1945–66). During this time, the artist developed his signature style featuring thin, elongated figures animated by vigorously modeled surfaces. Encompassing a range of media—sculpture, painting and drawing—the show includes 60 works, draws on the deep resources of the artist's personal collection and examines his singular concern for the human form. The touring exhibition makes its national debut in Cleveland, where it is on view in the Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation Exhibition Hall from March 12 to June 12, 2022. ***Alberto Giacometti: Toward the Ultimate Figure*** will also be presented at the Seattle Art Museum; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City.

Alberto Giacometti presents this incredibly important artist's evolution toward his 'ultimate figures' and most recognizable forms, the walking man and standing woman," said William M. Griswold, director of the Cleveland Museum of Art. "The exhibition surveys Giacometti's creative process, from his experimentation with plinths to his exploration of the space between the object and the viewer to his grappling with the tension between naturalism and abstraction."

Widely acclaimed as one of the most important sculptors of the 20th century, Giacometti reasserted the validity of the figure and figural representation at a time when abstract art had become dominant in the international art world. His works became associated with existentialism, a philosophy that questions the nature of the human condition. To many, Giacometti's emaciated figures—pervaded by feelings of alienation, fear, insignificance and uncertainty—embody the psychological complexities of the Cold War era that followed in the wake of World War II. Stripped to essentials, compressed and flattened, these fragile beings present themselves as expressions of a deep crisis facing art and humanity.

"Giacometti spent a lifetime struggling to resolve fundamental issues in the nature of sculpture," said William Robinson, senior curator of modern art. "This exhibition explores his development of distinctive figures that speak to the anxieties of the modern age. The works are presented in twelve thematic sections that take visitors through Giacometti's intense focus on the human figure and the development of his signature style."

Paris: Life in a Studio in Montparnasse

Giacometti moved to Paris in 1922 to study with sculptor Antoine Bourdelle at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière. Four years later, he began renting a studio measuring only 16 x 16 feet in a small house in the Montparnasse district of Paris. He maintained this legendary studio until his death in 1966 and produced the majority of his works there. After his death, the plaster walls he had filled with painted images were removed and preserved by his widow, Annette.

Obsessed with Heads

Like most artists of the period, Giacometti had been trained to draw and sculpt from live models. He became obsessed with rendering heads early in his career, but upon entering his Surrealist period in the late 1920s, he stopped working from models in favor of inventing images inspired by memories, dreams and hallucinations.

Into Thin Air

Giacometti was deeply concerned with the relationship between the figure and the surrounding space. He wanted his figures to appear as if viewed from a distance, stripped to essentials and devoid of any sense of narrative or anecdote. Giacometti advanced this concept in the late 1940s and 1950s by elongating his figures into filament-thin shapes that almost seem to disappear when viewed from certain angles.

On Solid Ground

Giacometti considered the base or platform an integral part of a sculpture. Determined to reinvent the most fundamental aspects of the medium, he explored ways of altering the size, scale and position of the base in relation to the figure. He also investigated methods of stacking several bases in ways that give even tiny figures a sense of solemnity and grandeur. Attaching his emaciated figures securely to a base or platform also introduced a contravening force to their progressive dematerialization.

Other Spaces: Landscapes

While known for his figural works, Giacometti also sketched and painted landscapes. During his later years, he merged the genres of landscape and figure representation. His sculptures *The Forest* and *The Glade* of 1950 contain multiple tall figures rising from a broad platform to suggest trees or wild plants growing in a meadow or an opening in the mountains. Faces and bodies in his figural sculptures also began to resemble boulders in a mountain landscape.

Creating a Myth: Giacometti Seen by Photographers

Giacometti's reputation as a fiercely independent voice in the international art world was greatly enhanced by photographers who recorded and disseminated his image. Man Ray and Rogi André produced memorable portraits of Giacometti during the 1930s. Robert Doisneau, Gordon Parks and Arnold Newman photographed the artist with his sculptures in the studio in the 1940s and 1950s. Internationally renowned photographers Irving Penn and Richard Avedon produced portraits of Giacometti in the 1950s. Henri Cartier-Bresson, Gisèle Freund and Yousuf Karsh contributed to Giacometti's growing fame through their compelling images of the artist during the final decade of his life.

Alberto Giacometti: A Portrait in Film

In 1964 Swiss photographer Ernst Scheidegger began shooting a documentary film about Giacometti. Scheidegger completed a 25-minute version of the film in 1966 and released a 50-minute version in 1998. A frequent visitor to Giacometti's Paris studio, Scheidegger produced a large corpus of photographs of the artist and his works. Selected excerpts from the 50-minute film are shown in this gallery.

Giacometti and the Literary Scene

Giacometti was intimately involved in the literary scene and wrote incessantly to express his experience of the world. He published texts in avant-garde journals and maintained close friendships with eminent writers, including André Breton, Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Giacometti was also a prolific illustrator of poetry books. Several writers in his circle, including Jacques Dupin and Jean Genet, published essays and articles that contributed to the artist's critical reception in the international art world.

The Human Condition

In the late 1940s, Giacometti's art became associated with existentialism, often described as a philosophical inquiry into the human condition. Giacometti's search for a universal art that would express the nature of the human condition emerges most clearly in his sculptures of emaciated figures trapped in a metal cage or walking in separate directions through empty city squares.

Models from the Inner Circle

Since Giacometti sought inspiration in the world around him, he needed models. But that was challenging, as he was extremely demanding, typically requiring the model to remain immobile in a closed position through multiple sittings that stretched over time. He frequently relied on close friends and relatives. Among his favorite models were his younger brother Diego and his wife, Annette.

Grappling with the Real

Giacometti's struggle to resolve the tension between abstraction and naturalism is an ever-present feature of his paintings and sculptures. It appears in his portraits of the late 1940s and emerges in his sculptures of Eli Lotar, a photographer and friend, who posed for a series of half-length figures in the 1960s. Neither fully naturalistic nor abstract, his postwar portraits are infused with the same feelings of doubt and uncertainty as his standing and walking figures.

Standing Woman, Walking Man

Giacometti's long search for the ultimate figure culminated in his large standing woman and walking man sculptures of the postwar period. He first began exploring these themes in a walking woman sculpture of 1932. He returned to the idea in the 1940s and created two distinct types: a standing woman and a walking man. By developing his figures in opposite directions, he accentuated the contrasting qualities of stillness and dynamism, timelessness and temporality. Subjected to a process of elongation, these thin, emaciated figures signaled a radical rejection of the weight and permanence of traditional marble sculpture.

Exhibition Catalogue

Alberto Giacometti: Toward the Ultimate Figure is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue featuring more than one hundred sculptures, paintings, drawings and prints. It offers a comprehensive survey of the artist's work, from its beginnings in Stampa to its development in Paris. Essays by experts on Giacometti and modern art focus on masterpieces such as the *Walking Man*, the *Nose* and the *Chariot* and on key aspects of his work, such as the significance of Surrealism, his drawing practice and the relationship between forms and space in his sculptures.

The catalogue is edited by Émilie Bouvard, director of collections and scientific programme, Fondation Giacometti, Paris, with contributions by Catherine Grenier, director, Fondation Giacometti, and president, Giacometti Institute; William Robinson, senior curator of modern art, the Cleveland Museum of Art; Catharina Manchanda, curator of modern and contemporary art, Seattle Art Museum; Serena Bucalo-Mussely, curator, Fondation Giacometti; Hugo Daniel, head of the École des Modernités and programs and associate curator, Fondation Giacometti; William Rudolph, deputy director of curatorial affairs, the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City; Ann Dumas, curator of European art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and Romain Perrin, associate curator, Fondation Giacometti.

Alberto Giacometti: Toward the Ultimate Figure is published by the CMA and distributed by Yale University Press. It will be available for purchase online or at the Cleveland Museum of Art store for \$50.

Complementary Programming

Gallery Conversation: Contemplating Humanity ^[2]

The Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation Exhibition Hall

Tuesdays, March 15, April 19, May 17, 12:15 p.m.

Free with exhibition ticket

In his figurative sculptures and drawings, Alberto Giacometti visualized the human condition at a time of great anxiety much like our own.

Join CMA staff and contemplative guide [Gwendolyn Ren](#) ^[3] for an exploratory experience in the exhibition *Alberto Giacometti: Toward the Ultimate Figure*, ^[1] which combines meditation techniques and close looking of the artist's work.

Contemplation through Meditation ^[4]

The Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation Exhibition Hall

Sundays, March 27, April 24, May 22, 2:15 p.m.

Free with exhibition ticket

Join contemplative guide [Gwendolyn Ren](#) ^[5] for a meditation session in the exhibition *Alberto Giacometti: Toward the Ultimate Figure*. ^[6]

Member Preview Day

Members see it FIRST and for FREE!

Members can view *Alberto Giacometti* first on Member Preview Day, Friday, March 11, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. [Join today](#) ^[7] and reserve free tickets.

Ticket Pricing

Adults \$15; seniors, students and children ages 6–17 \$12; children 5 and under and CMA members free.

The CMA recommends reserving tickets through its online platform by visiting the [Alberto Giacometti exhibition webpage](#) ^[8]. Tickets can also be reserved by phone at 216-421-7350 or on-site at one of the ticket desks.

Tickets are expected to book quickly and are not guaranteed. Your first choice of date and time may not be available, so please have other date and time options in mind when reserving tickets. **Advance ticket sales are highly recommended.**

Exhibition Tour

Tours of *Alberto Giacometti* are offered Tuesday through Sunday at 11:15 a.m. When reserving your exhibition ticket, select "Tour 11:15 AM," and choose your quantity. The tour will be included with your exhibition ticket.

Combination Ticket

A combination ticket that includes admission to *Alberto Giacometti* and *The New Black Vanguard: Photography between Art and Fashion* ^[9], on view May 8, to September 11, 2022, will be available for the days that both shows are open: May 8 to June 12, 2022. More information is forthcoming. Please visit [cma.org](#) ^[9] to stay up to date.

Alberto Giacometti: Toward the Ultimate Figure is co-organized by the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Fondation Giacometti, Paris.

Generous support is provided in memory of Helen M. DeGulis, by Malcolm Kenney, and by Mr. and Mrs. Frank H. Porter Jr.

All exhibitions at the Cleveland Museum of Art are underwritten by the CMA Fund for Exhibitions. Generous annual support is provided by an anonymous supporter, Dick Blum* and Harriet Warm, Dr. Ben H. and Julia Brouhard, Mr. and Mrs. Walter R. Chapman Jr., the Jeffery Wallace Ellis Trust in memory of Lloyd H. Ellis Jr., Leigh and Andy Fabens, Michael Frank in memory of Patricia Snyder, the Sam J. Frankino Foundation, Janice Hammond and Edward Hemmelgarn, Eva and Rudolf Linnebach, William S. and Margaret F. Lipscomb, Tim O'Brien and Breck Platner, Anne H. Weil, and the Womens Council of the Cleveland Museum of Art.

*Deceased

Additional Information

The CDC [updated its guidelines](#) ^[10] regarding the need to wear face coverings in public settings for protection against COVID-19. The CMA recommends but no longer requires visitors to wear a face covering inside the building.

The CMA's current hours of operation are Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Friday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. The museum is closed Mondays. Updated hours will be announced as decided. Visit [cma.org](#) ^[9] to stay up to date on this information.

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About the Cleveland Museum of Art

The Cleveland Museum of Art is renowned for the quality and breadth of its collection, which includes more than 63,000 artworks and spans 6,000 years of achievement in the arts. The museum is a significant international forum for exhibitions, scholarship and performing arts and is a leader in digital innovations. One of the top comprehensive art museums in the nation, recognized for its award-winning Open Access program and free of charge to all, the Cleveland Museum of Art is located in the University Circle neighborhood.

The museum is supported in part by residents of Cuyahoga County through a public grant from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture and made possible in part by the Ohio Arts Council (OAC), which receives support from the State of Ohio and the National Endowment for the Arts. The OAC is a state agency that funds and supports quality arts experiences to strengthen Ohio communities culturally, educationally and economically. For more information about the museum and its holdings, programs and events, call 888-CMA-0033 or visit cma.org [11].

Press Announcements [12]

Source URL: <https://www.clevelandart.org/about/press/media-kit/cleveland-museum-art-presents-exhibition-alberto-giacometti-toward-ultimate-figure>

Links

[1] <https://nam11.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.clevelandart.org%2Fexhibitions%2Falberto-giacometti-toward-ultimate-figure&data=04%7C01%7CDNoel%40clevelandart.org%7C4ba4ca2cf7b9463f4ff808d9c3f457a1%7Cb4253cf323c34e23b1510c32273cd7c5%7C0%7C1%7C637756276488765992%7C>
[2] <https://www.clevelandart.org/events/special-events/alberto-giacometti-contemplating-humanity>, [3] <https://nam11.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gwendolynren.com%2Fabout&data=04%7C01%7CDNoel%40clevelandart.org%7C4ba4ca2cf7b9463f4ff808d9c3f457a1%7Cb4253cf323c34e23b1510c3227>
[4] <https://www.clevelandart.org/events/special-events/contemplation-through-meditation> [5] <https://www.gwendolynren.com/about> [6] <https://www.clevelandart.org/exhibitions/alberto-giacometti-toward-ultimate-figure> [7] <https://engage.clevelandart.org/donate/i/3> [8] <https://www.clevelandart.org/exhibitions/new-black-vanguard-photography-between-art-and-fashion> [9] <https://www.clevelandart.org/> [10] <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/covid-by-county.html> [11] <https://www.clevelandart.org> [12] <https://www.clevelandart.org/about/press/media-kit>